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ABSTRACT

Noting that poetry reading and writing can be arduous or self-fulfilling for children, this paper presents guidelines, activities, and a list of suggested books for enhancing poetry appreciation. Guidelines presented in the paper for poetry reading include: read poetry aloud every day to help children understand the rhythm and music of the form; plan and select poetry carefully; display poems read aloud; and provide opportunities for students to read or recite a favorite poem individually, with a partner, or with a chorus. Guidelines in the paper for stimulating poetry writing include: topic selection should originate in the feelings and experiences of the children; and initial poetry writing should be collaborative. The paper concludes with a categorized annotated bibliography (with accompanying activities for many of the books) of 23 poetry books published between 1974 and 1992 for children 8 to 12 years old. (RS)

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Guidelines for Children's Poetry Appreciation and Poetry Writing and Suggested Books and Activities

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Guidelines for Children's Poetry Appreciation and Poetry Writing and Suggested Books and Activities

Poetry reading and writing can be arduous or self-fulfilling for children. In order to make poetry the latter for children, teachers should carefully choose activities, as well as sample poetry. The following guidelines and activities are recommended for enhancing poetry appreciation.

1. Read poetry aloud every day to help children enjoy and understand the rhythm and music of the form.

2. Plan and select poetry carefully.

   a. Initially, select poetry that you feel close to and poetry that has immediate appeal to children, e.g. humorous poetry about familiar experience.

   b. Select poetry that can stand alone - without extensive explanation.

   c. Later, you may choose to devote weekly selections to a theme, author, or upcoming holiday.

3. Ask open-ended questions after poetry readings.

4. Employ cooperative groups whereby group members, e.g. discuss what the poem conveys to them or reconstruct a disassembled poem after initial presentation.

5. Display prominantly in the classroom any poem read aloud.

6. Duplicate poems read aloud for interested individuals to read by themselves.

7. Provide opportunities for students to read or recite a favorite poem individually, with a partner, or with a chorus, but don't force students to memorize poetry and perform before the class.

In stimulating poetry writing by children the following guidelines and activities are recommended.

1. Before children write poetry, they must have read and listened to poetry.

2. As poetry writing is introduced, teachers should bear in mind:

   a. There are no "poetry rules" to which students must adhere.

   b. There is no right or wrong thought.

   c. Children should be guided to avoid cliches.

   d. Children may have to be convinced that poetry doesn't have to rhyme.

   e. The creative process and the editing process are separate processes.

3. Topic selection should originate in the feelings and experiences of the children in your classroom.

4. Initial poetry writing should be a collaborative effort in which the class brainstorms ideas and then a class poem is composed using the chalkboard or overhead projector.

5. Individual composition follows a collaborative effort. (Just as humorous poetry may have been introduced in first poetry readings by the teacher, writing of humorous poetry may be natural first attempts, e.g. limericks.)

While keeping the preceding recommendations in mind to meet the teacher's goals, the teacher should also consider the students' interests as he/she contemplates selection of sample poetry. The following categorized annotated bibliography of poetry books for children includes books that appeal to the interests and concerns of children 8 to 12. Activities are suggested for each book or category - activities that either support poetry appreciation or poetry writing.

A Categorized Annotated Bibliography of Poetry Books for Children and Suggested Related Activities

Humorous and Nonsense Verse

Ciardi, J. (1989). The hopeful trout and other limericks. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Included are 40 limericks by John Ciardi which outrage, insult, and entertain. They are categorized, the first category being "Sometimes Even Parents Win."

Activity: The limerick from which the title comes can be used as a stimulus for such limericks as "The Hopeful Pig," "The Hopeful Cow," "The Hopeful Tuna," and other possibilities which will come about through brainstorming

Kennedy, X.J. (1989). Ghastlies, goops, and pincushions. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books.

X.J. Kennedy, a noted poet and versifier with a keen sense of what children delight in, creates absurdly funny situations and etches memorable portraits of people-one-hopes-never-to-meet. Several limericks are included.

Activity: Share such poems as "Advice," "The Case of the Crumbled Cookies," and "A Misspent Youth" and have the class collaboratively compose similar poems.

Lobel, A. (1983). The book of pigericks. New York: Harper Trophy.

Included within this slim volume are thirty-eight original limericks about all manner of pigs.

Activity: Additional pigericks, both collaborative and individual compositions can be placed in a class book entitled More Pigericks or Pig Out on Pigericks.

Activity: Instead of pigericks, the class could compose dogericks, catericks, or bugericks.

Moss, J. (1989). The butterfly jar.
New York: Bantam Books.

This first book of poems by Jeff Moss, head writer for Sesame Street, is filled with memorable characters.

Activity: The teacher can share these read-aloud poems with students and vice versa.

Prelutsky, J. (Ed.). (1991). For laughing out loud.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf

This is a collection of poems selected to tickle your funny bone.

Activity: Share such poems as "Humpty Dumpty," Rules," and "A Big Bare Bear" and have the students collaboratively and\or individually compose similar poems.

Prelutsky, J. (1984). The new kid on the block.
New York: Greenwillow Books.

The poet Prelutsky has written poems about things you may have never thought about before, e.g. jellyfish stew; why you shouldn't argue with a shark; having an alligator as a pet.

Activity: The teacher can share these read-aloud poems with her students and vice versa.

Sawyer, P. (1978). There once was a book of limericks.
Milwaukee: Raintree Children's Books.

This book is a useful stimulus for the writing of limericks. The short introduction explains the typical form of a limerick. Each limerick is illustrated by a different individual.

Activity: After sharing this book and collaboratively composing limericks, children can write their own limericks and illustrate them.

Silverstein, S. (1981). A light in the attic.
New York.: Harper and Row.

Poems in this volume include "Messy Room," "Prayer of the Selfish Child," "Unscratchable Itch," and "Homework Machine," a sampling of the more than 100 humorous poems created with children in mind.

Activity: Poetry readings can be staged with props, music, and action.

Silverstein, S. (1974). Where the sidewalk ends. New York: Harper and Row.

Shel Silverstein's humorous poems and drawings are from the viewpoint of a child. The collection begins with an invitation, "...If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar..., If you're a pretender come sit by my fire ...." Because of their humorous appeal, these poems may serve as a first introduction to poetry.

Activity: The class can compile a book of favorite poems by Shel Silverstein.

Matters of Extreme Importance to Children

The Subject of Food

Adoff,A. (1979). Eats. New York: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepherd Books.

Arnold Adoff celebrates a love affair with food with lip-smacking detail.

Cole, W. (Ed.). (1981). Poem stew. New York:J.B. Lippincott.

These 57 witty food poems are written by authors such Shel Silverstein, Ogden Nash, John Updike, and Myra Cohn Livingston. The collection provides a delightful introduction to poetry.

Goldstein, B. (Ed.). (1992). What's on the menu? New York: Viking.

Poems in this collection are categorized: Breakfast Foods, Favorite Foods, Special Treats, and Eating under Stars and Sun.

Activity: Children can create a poetry menu, a collection of food poems which would reflect a desired or recommended diet for a day. Poems selected could be from the three books listed and/or those written by the children themselves.

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Activity: Children can create concrete poems for their favorite foods, least favorite foods, or treats.

Hooray for Holidays!

Livingston, M. C. (1989). Birthday poems. New York: Holiday House.

This is an original collection of poems centering around that special day for every child. The majority of the poems are for eight-year-olds or younger.

Activity: The teacher can read a poem from the collection when it is a child's birthday. Since some of the poems include a child's name, substitute the honoree's name for the name in the poem.

Livingston, M. C. (Ed.). (1987). New Year's poems. New York: Holiday House.

This is a distinguished mixture of old and new poems to celebrate the New Year.

Activity: Since several poems in this anthology describe various New Year traditions , e. g. Chinese, Cornish..., students may choose to fashion poetry reflecting the New Year tradition in their culture, region, or familial setting.

Prelutsky, J. (1977). It's halloween. New York: Scholastic.

Twelve Halloween poems are included in this small volume. A cassette recording is available.

Activity: After sharing these Halloween poems, allow students to make their own recordings, complete with sound effects.

Prelutsky, J. (1983). It's valentine's day. New York: Scholastic.

Fourteen poems revolving around the mid-February holiday are included. A cassette recording is available.

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Activity: After sharing these poems, the class or individuals may compose a poem similar to "I Made My Dog a Valentine," or "I Love You More Than Applesauce."

Wallace, D. (Ed.). (1976) Witch poems.
New York: Holiday House.

Elegant eerie illustrations accompany these scratchy, screechy, scrawly poems about small witches, nasty witches, nice witches, old witches and young witches.

Activity: Read, display and distribute poems from this collection. Encourage students to illustrate one or more of the poems individually or in a cooperative group - without having seen the black and white illustrations by Trina Hyman. Afterward have them compare their illustrations to those in the text.

Worth, V. (1992) At christmastime.
New York: Harper Collins.

Valerie Worth's poems take us from the first excitement of early December through the wistful farewells of Twelfth Night.

Activity: As poems are shared from this festive collection, volunteers may choose to copy a poem in writing or on a word processor, attach it to the back of an illustration representing the poem's theme, and hang it on a class Christmas tree or one at home.

Color My World

Adoff, A. (1988). Greens.
New York: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepherd Books.

The many shades of green are celebrated by the poet, as well as the central place of color in the child's world.

Activity: One way of sharing Adoff's poetry effectively with a group is via the overhead projector. In this way, students can "see" how the poetry he uses is full of music, rhythm, and rhyme. If a student has an affinity for a particular color, he may attempt a similar collection, e.g. "Blues," "Reds," ....

Monsters I Have Known

Wallace, D. (Ed.). (1976). Monster poems.
New York: Holiday House.

This small book of poems tells of the monster in the closet, the monster from the zoo, and still more monsters - some even hidden in the illustrations.

Prelutsky, J. (1976). Nightmares.
New York: Greenwillow Books.

These poems designed to trouble your sleep enshrine the creatures of nightmare : ghoul, bogeyman, witch, werewolf, and ogre.

Activity: After children are exposed to the two books above, they may express their fear of monsters through their own poems and illustrations. "The Long-Haired Griggle" and "The Ugstabuggle" from Wallace's book could be used as models in cooperative group efforts prior to individual composition.

Friendship

Prelutsky, J. (1980). Rolling harvey down the hill.
New York: Greenwillow Books.

An appealing gang of boys is made real by the poet. The boys in your class may identify with one or more of them.

Activity: Cooperative groups based on friendship could compose a series of poems based on their shared escapades and differing personalities - similar to those of Tony, Lump, Harvey, and Will.

Concrete Poetry

Froman, R. (1974). Seeing things: a book of poems. New York: Crowell.

Concrete poetry, written so that graphic form becomes a part of the message, will motivate children to experiment with poetry and visualize words in new ways.

Activity: Concrete poems, written during the course of a thematic unit, can be bound in a class book.

For Further Reading

Cecil, N. L. (1993). Teaching to the heart. Salem, WS: Sheffield.

Glazer, J. I. & Lamme, L. L. Poem picture books and their uses. The Reading Teacher, 44, 102-109.

Harms, J. M. & Lettow, L. J. Recent poetry books for children. The Reading Teacher, 45, 274-279.

Heller, M. F. (1991). Reading-writing connections from theory to practice. New York: Longman.

Larrick, N. (1987). Keep a poem in your pocket. In B. E. Cullinan (Ed.), Children's literature in the reading program. Newark, DE : International Reading Association.

Webre, E. C. (1989). Content-area-related books for the young : a categorized annotated bibliography selected from "Children's Choices". Lafayette, LA : University of Southwestern Louisiana. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 303 775).